

Amph.
Relig.
Theol.



"The Relation of Church and State"



A Sermon

PREACHED BY THE

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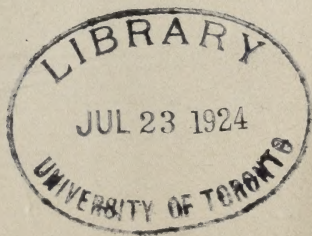
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“THE RELATION OF CHURCH AND STATE”

Text:—“Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”
—Matthew 22:21.

This must be a genuine saying of our Lord, for the identical episode and the identical words are to be found in three gospels—in Matthew 22:21, in Mark 12:17, and again in Luke 20:25. There is no ample reason for doubting that this passage at least is true, or that Christ actually said these words as the narrative gives them. The synoptists further agree that when Christ spake as he did, his questioners were silenced and marvelled. They could not take hold of his words. They could not commit him without committing themselves, and consequently went away.

These questioners were endeavoring to involve Christ with the political authorities. They were jealous of his power, opposed to his teaching, and fearful of its consequences to the standing order. They suspected that Christ would one day announce his kingship, inaugurate a revolution which might perhaps involve them and their families, and imperil their offices. They considered it a safer course to nip the feared revolution in the bud. They would catch Christ in some disloyal utterance, report the saying to the secret service, and then leave the matter of his sudden disappearance to the proper courts. They suspected that he was sensitive on the money question. Most of the Galileans, like most Americans, were never exuberant at the thought of paying their taxes. They felt that taxation and robbery were synonymous terms. They would sound Jesus on this

issue. They would ask him a casual question concerning the obligation to pay tribute. He would probably tell them that Herod had no right to tax the people, and they would have him just where they wanted him to be. And so they began by flattery. To tell him that they believed in his sincerity and fearlessness might turn his head and, making him fearless, make him also indiscreet. "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of man. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is the image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's".

The consummate cleverness of this reply is in some measure lost on us because of our familiarity with the incident, but even at that it clearly reveals Jesus as a master of repartee. He committed himself so far as his questioners were concerned—he called them hypocrites; but so far as Caesar was concerned, he left that to their consciences and to yours and to mine. It was as much as to say: there is a sphere in which the state is supreme, there is a sphere in which the church is supreme; don't confuse the spheres.

Well, there came a time in the history of the church when it was very difficult not to confuse the spheres. St. Paul found it advisable from time to time to exhort the early Christians not to waver in their allegiance to the magistrates: "Let every soul

be subject unto the higher powers" he writes; "render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; honour to whom honour; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear". Peter, also, in his first epistle, writes "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well". But in spite of these admonitions, it was not long before the case of the conscientious objector presented itself in the rank and file of the church.

The first great clash between church and state came with the decision of the Roman emperors that all their subjects should offer incense before their images and yield to the emperor, worship as to a God, as well as allegiance as to a sovereign. The Christians decided that they could not render unto Caesar the things which were God's, and as a result of their decision they laid themselves open to charges of treason and atheism. Wiser than their Teutonic brethren of a later day, they refused to believe that there was any collusion between God and the Emperor, and they reserved for the King of Kings that homage to which He alone was entitled. For their loyalty to Christ, they went to jail, they suffered derision, they were executed, and the annals of the early Church ran red with the blood of the martyrs.

Well, the conscientious objector suffered, and willingly at that. But the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, and very soon the Christian Church became the dominant political fact in the Roman Empire. About 378 A. D. Theodosius the emperor in a fit of anger locked the doors of an amphitheatre in Thessalonica and sent his soldiers in to slay

the people. In the course of a few hours seven thousand defenceless men, women and children were massacred. Sometime later, according to an ancient story, Theodosius endeavored to attend church at Milan in royal state. But he was met at the door by the bishop, the great Ambrose, who refused him entrance. "You may not enter" he said "This is no place for such as you unless you come in deepest shame and sorrow. Go back to your palace! Your hands drip with blood! Repent! repent! and then come; but not now."* The scales had turned. The people who had determined to render unto God the things that were God's, were now in a position to give to the emperor all that was coming to him. Theodosius did not dare to defy the Bishop.

The struggle went on. Eventually the church as an international organization was able to dominate the respective states of Europe. And up to the conclusion of the 13th century, this domination of the church made on the whole for social justice. You remember the fight between King Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII or Hildebrand. Henry IV claimed the

*Modern criticism tends to spoil this dramatic story and claims that it is exaggerated. It is generally attributed to Theodoret. We quote the Catholic Encyclopedia: "In order to avoid meeting the blood-stained monarch or offering up the Holy Sacrifice in his presence, and, moreover, to give him time to ponder the enormity of a deed so foreign to his character, the Saint, pleading ill-health, . . . retired to the country, whence he sent a noble letter 'written with my own hand, that thou alone mayst read it' exhorting the Emperor to repair his crime by an exemplary penance. With 'religious humility' says St. Augustine, Theodosius submitted 'and, being laid hold of by the discipline of the Church did penance in such a way that the sight of his imperial loftiness prostrated made the people who were interceding for him weep more than the consciousness of offence had made them fear it when enraged'. This plain narrative, without theatrical setting, is much more honorable both to the Bishop and his sovereign."

right to appoint Bishops of his own choosing and to invest them with the symbols of their office. The church denied the right of lay investiture. Henry IV, in furthering his claim, ventured to attack the personal character of the Pope, and the Pope in retaliation excommunicated him from the body of the faithful and absolved Henry's subjects from their oath of fealty and allegiance to him. It was the supreme defiance of the state by the church in all history. A few months after the writ of excommunication, the barons informed Henry that he must regain the favor of the Church within a stated period or be dethroned. And so we find the great sovereign making a pilgrimage to Italy, to the castle of Canossa where His Holiness was in residence; it was winter, the month of January 1077, and yet for three days the Pope denied the King an interview, but kept him shivering outside the walls of the castle. At last he admitted the penitent, placed his foot upon the King's neck, heard his confession, and restored him to the rights of the faithful. In that dramatic moment the church proved its triumph.

We Protestants are apt to feel that this claim of temporal power, this insistence on the right to anoint or depose monarchs, was a bad thing. But in an age of despotic rulers, it was a good thing to have some one over them whose threats had to be regarded. And it is not without significance that the first defenders of the people's rights in England against the aggressions of a monarchy that would be absolute, were two of the most famous Archbishops. Anselm and Thomas a Becket. These men stood firm for the application of Christian truth to the government of the people, and the latter at least paid the penalty of his courage by martyrdom. In the controversy between Thomas a Becket and King Henry II, the king reminded the archbishop that he was of lowly birth. "Are you not

my man, the son of one of my servants", he said. "In truth" the archbishop answered "I am not sprung from a race of kings. Neither was blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, to whom was committed the leadership of the Church". "And in truth Peter died for his Lord" suggested the King. "I, too, will die for my Lord when the time comes" replied the Archbishop. It was well for England and for the future liberties of the English-speaking people that the Church was strong enough to defy the throne.

But by the beginning of the fourteenth century the church was deteriorating. The high ecclesiastics now sought power not so much to further Christian civilization thereby, but rather to fatten their own skins. In the wake of a disgusting selfishness, came corruption, simony, shameless bartering in absolutions, degrading intrigues, brutality, murder, rapine, and the slime of the unchaste. All this made the Reformation necessary. It spelt a return to the simplicity which was in Christ, and made for the priesthood of the believer. All this was well and essential, but it was not effected before it had broken down the conception of an international and Catholic Church and established in its place the idea of a church protected, sustained and governed by the State. The International Church gave way to the National Church, as Luther threw himself into the arms of the Elector of Saxony. The German Church became the vassal of the German princes from that time on to the tragic years through which we have just passed and is it not prophetic that a few years after the Reformation, when the Peasants' Rebellion broke out, Luther sided with the monarch against the peasants? Is that the legitimate consequence of a state church?

In England a much-to-be-married monarch wanted to divorce one wife and marry another. He sought a

divorce from the church and was refused. When he understood that the Pope would not yield on this moral issue, Henry VIII availed himself of the growing opposition to papal interference with the internal affairs of his realm to declare himself Head of the Church, in which capacity he granted himself a divorce. Thus, the Church of England went over to the Reformation and became separated from the great Roman Communion*. Here, again, is the idea of a national church as opposed to that of an international church, and here again is to be traced much of the ineffectiveness of Anglican Christianity. Within the last few years the Church in England has been seeking to free itself from the control of the state without at the same time relinquishing its financial claims upon the state. It realizes to-day that it can not fulfill its spiritual destiny if it is to be but the echo of the political leaders.

In America the Puritans endeavored to worship God in freedom, but soon there arose the standing order—the Congregational Church which in some places became intolerant ~~to~~ other ministries, and as a result of the difficulties in Boston, we have the founding of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations by Roger Williams and John Clarke, wherein should be set forth the lively experiment of a “free church in a free state,” in truth, a new experiment in government. In 1818 the Congregational Church of Connecticut became disestablished by law, and henceforth it was decreed the state should be freed from any ecclesiastical control, and better still, of

*Of course, Henry's desire for a divorce was not the final cause of England's disavowal of the authority of the See of Rome in affairs ecclesiastical. It may have been the immediate cause, but the final cause was a nation-wide disaffection with papal interference and contempt for false emphases in the church.

the church was to be free from any state interference except insofar as any legal corporation should be required to abide by the general laws. Is this final separation of church and state the fuller exegesis of the words of our Lord: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's"? That remains to be seen.

But the problem of the relationship of church and state is as yet by no means settled, and it continually emerges to baffle politicians and churchmen alike. It presents itself now in the question of a contribution from the state toward the support of a sectarian institution; now in the utilization of public buildings for religious purposes; now in the introduction of religious training or bible teaching in the public schools; now in the appointment of chaplains and governmental provision for the spiritual needs of the men of the army and navy; now in the case of the conscientious objectors to military service—the Quakers or the Russellites; (in the latter instance we sentenced many of them to prison during the war when we had better have sentenced them to a theological seminary); now in the matter of exemption of the clergy from military service—France refusing exemption for priest or preacher and sending both armed with rifles to the trenches while America included in Class V of the draft clergymen, politicians and imbeciles, no matter whether the order be ascending or descending. The question of the relation of church and state has not yet been definitely settled, and there are some who look forward to the establishment of an American Catholic Church which will be in some measure a state church, although the words American and Catholic are, properly speaking, antithetical, for 'Catholic' means 'universal' and an American Universal Church is more of an anomaly

than the Anglican, Greek or Russian churches in America are anomalies.

Now, along what lines must the church of the future proceed? Surely not along the lines of a national church. The Church of Jesus Christ must not become the mere shadow of the state. No, we have seen far too clearly the imminent danger, to use the words of Dr. Orchard, of a national church becoming an accomplice in a national crime. The impotence of the National Church of Germany to defy the philosophy of Junkerdom is a lesson which we can never forget. So, too, the domination of the great Russian church by the bureaucracy, was fatal both to the church and to the bureaucracy. Now that the church is freed from the shackles of the imperial power, now that it is confined to the all-important spiritual ministry to the souls of men, it may recover something of the prestige and the glory which for the time being have departed. And if order is ever restored to Russia on just and equitable foundations, I verily believe that the church there will have much to do with such restoration. A state church is a source of spiritual death; a free church in a free state is a source of spiritual life.

During the war, we placed in the most prominent places in the sanctuary the national ensign. And yet, in many of these very churches, the Christian emblem, the cross, was conspicuous by its absence. In the chancel of a Canadian church I saw the flags of all the allies, the Union Jack in the centre, the Stars and Stripes to its right. But there was no crucifix, in the sign of which the Church is supposed to conquer. And I ventured to call the attention of one of my ministerial colleagues to the omission. "Why is it" I said "that so many of our churches have no scruples whatever against displaying the ensign of their nation in

the sanctuary, and yet consider it idolatry to display the ensign of the Crucified Lord, the battle-standard of the Christian Church? Is it, that, in times of war, the allegiance to the state obscures and adumbrates the allegiance of the Christian to Jesus Christ? Are we in the church rendering unto Caesar the things that belong unto God?"

No, men and women, we Christians can not afford to supplant true religion by mere patriotism, and the fundamental Christian love of all humanity, virtuous and errant, which so loves the world that it gives itself for the world, by mere love of country, howsoever sublime and noble that love of country may be. Edith Cavell taught us that love of country was not enough and because she believed that love of country was not enough, she found it easier to love her country unto the death. No girl can afford to receive the devotion of a man who loves not honor more than herself, and no nation can afford to receive the allegiance of one who owns no higher allegiance to Almighty God.

So, too, in the hearts of those men who are thinking most seriously concerning the place of organized religion in the life of the world, there is emerging a great desire to make central the allegiance of the believer to Jesus Christ, and to make central the allegiance of the Christian to Holy Church. And further there is a deep passion for the establishment of a greater church than the world has ever known, a church that shall be international and not national in its scope, a church that shall incarnate and enshrine those imperishable ideals so needful for the salvation of men, a church freed from the shackles of a baneful and selfish hierarchy, a church freed too from all harmful subservience to the lords of the earth—built democratically upon the hearts and consciences of men supported by their free-will offerings, and going forth

on its high mission of redemption. Do you not catch a glimpse of its glory? I challenge you to participate in the creation of that vaster, more imperial, yet more Christian Church.

Do not mistake me. I would not advocate for the world of tomorrow a church that lived parasitically off the state, nor a church that sought through backstairs diplomacy to control the state, nor any church that did not invite the full and complete participation of its adherents in the government and administration of itself; I would not for one moment advocate a church that sought to supplant civil law by canon law—nevertheless, might it not be well for every state if there were in it, free from it and yet powerful, an international organization held together by a spiritual principle and a central loyalty, seeking the welfare not of the state alone, but of our larger humanity as well? Would it not have been well for our modern world had there been at the court of Berlin in the year 1914, no Herr Dryander confirming his Imperial Majesty in his iniquity, but a twentieth century Ambrose who would have barred the doors against Wilhelm Hohenzollern and bid him begone? Where, in all the war, did there emerge a more truly heroic figure than that of Mercier, Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, who did not hesitate, on behalf of his children in Christ, to protest the outrages of the invader to his face? And they dare not touch him—why? Because he represented another empire which cut civilization horizontally and which could not be outraged with impunity. O that we might effect, to the safety of mankind and the greater glory of God, a new international church, finding its central unity in Christ and bound together by the supreme purpose of making the will of God to prevail in the affairs of men!

But, I hear you say, is not this idea of an international church apt to lead to a divided allegiance? May there not come times when a churchman can not be loyal to the church without betraying the state, or loyal to the state without betraying the church? Obviously, that is possible. But if so, is it not but a continuation of the universal problem of conflicting loyalties? During the war, many a man debated to which he owed his supreme allegiance—to the family or to the state, to the wife and children whom he promised God to protect, or to the state which in days of war is alone able to protect him and them. Sometimes, the problem is easy enough to decide; at other times it is exceedingly complicated and must be solved in the light of our supreme allegiances. Judas had to choose between Christ and the authorities, and he chose the authorities.

Now, which can claim the supreme allegiance—the church or the state? The answer to this question depends upon our understanding of the nature of the church and the nature of the state.

The state is a unit, but what kind of a unit? Racial? No! Religious? No! Linguistic? No! Geographical? No! What then? Primarily economic and political, and political because economic. Few modern nations are homogeneous. Austria-Hungary we called a ramshackle empire, because of its variety of races, Russia for the same reason is a hodge-podge, and even these United States have been designated the melting-pot of the peoples of the world. The British Empire counts among its subjects 80 million Mohammedans, 200 million Buddhists and Hindus, 70 or more million Christians, and other millions barely emerging from savagery and cannibalism. This is not exactly a religious unit. No, the unit of government today is determined largely on economic grounds. The North

was unwilling to allow the South to secede because it felt that North and South constituted an economic unity, and hence a political unity, and I very much doubt if this great republic would today tolerate the secession of one single state. Canada looks with disfavor upon all talk of a secession in Quebec which would isolate the French-speaking peoples because Quebec is the highway to the sea and the economic future of the country depends upon that highway remaining under the control of the Dominion government. People who do not know what they are talking about often wonder why the United Kingdom is so averse to the establishment of a separate Ireland, and the answers are many, but the fundamental reason is that Ireland, as a backdoor to England, is economically and politically necessary to the British Empire, and *in the light of the present feeling in Ireland* it would be suicidal for Britain to allow her to secede. Men and women, the boundaries of the modern state are determined largely along economic lines. The modern state is primarily an economic unit, and the allegiance we owe her is largely an economic allegiance. Jesus took a *coin*, and asked, "Whose superscription is this" and they said "Caesar's". Then said he "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

On the other hand the church is a spiritual unit. That which holds Christians together is not the cash nexus but the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In all reason, then, which should have the greater claim upon our lives, an economic or a spiritual unit?

In the world of tomorrow, I see three great and fundamental tempers. There will be three great classes of men, each endeavoring to give a final solution to the problem of how to live together. The first group

believe in the will to power, economic if not military. They believe in getting and holding for themselves or for their class, every conceivable thing they can lay their hands upon. This is the great predatory class, and we shall discover them in every strata of society, not least in the awakened proletariat who will greet with enthusiasm any proposal to despoil the rich, who insist on the maintenance of a high scale of wages whether the services rendered in return for such wages justify such a remuneration or not, and who threaten through strikes to create nation-wide misery if they cannot get their own way. The security of the world of tomorrow cannot be entrusted to any predatory class of men who are seeking primarily to bleed another class.

The second group of men and they will become again an international force, are the Socialists. Their fundamental aim will be to repress the predatory instincts of mankind by government ownership and control of almost everything, but the method used will be that of excessive legislation and constant interference with personal liberty. The result will be that instead of repressing predatory instincts, they will repress human personality itself without which progress is impossible. On the whole, the aim of the Socialists may be laudable, but ~~its~~ ^{their} method is pernicious. Constant restrictions and legislative measures exasperate and do not inspire.

The third group of men stand for the interpretation of life in terms of the Christian principle of service. They ask of their fellow-men and of themselves, not the will to power which they properly consider unchristian, not the will to obey which Paul would call a thorn in the flesh and the curse of the law, but rather the will to serve. They ask not the repression of personality but its culture and expansion and consecra-

tion. They proceed not by legislation, although legislation has its place, but rather by providing motives of sacrifice and service in the vision of the Crucified Christ.

Now, men and women, the security of the world of the future rests upon the triumph of this third idea—the Christian principle of service. And how is this idea to be incarnated in the world if not through an international Christian church? A new, international, universal, ‘Catholic’ church uniting men in God and in Christ, providing the motives for service and sacrifice, is the one hope and salvation of mankind.

Catholic, I said, which means ‘universal’, and not Roman. I pledge you my readiness to stand firm in the fight against every selfish effort of any church to seek her temporal aggrandizement by the spoliation of the state; I pledge you my readiness to stand firm against every assumption of any church in her exclusive right to the inheritance of the believer in Christ; I pledge you my readiness to stand firm against any ecclesiastical authority which professes to rule through divine right and without training the people in self-government. But at the same time I pledge you that I will seek to hope for the creation of such a Catholic Church in the world of tomorrow as will include all that is best in Protestantism and all that is best in Roman Catholicism and all that is best in the Holy Eastern Church and so far as they can be eliminated none of the worst features of these churches, not one of which is without serious defects.

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s”. Consider these words, if you will, in the light of one Holy Catholic and Universal Church, bound together by a central loyalty to Christ and to His Kingdom, seeking not

simply its own welfare but primarily the salvation of mankind, offering men a religious experience incomparably greater and richer than anything which any church has to offer today, challenging their devotion, their energy, their gifts, their prayers, and so increasing the sphere of its authority in the domain of the spirit that it may at length bring the earth to the footstool of God and render unto Him, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the glory and power and majesty and dominion which belong unto Him alone. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!



